saalt SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS LEADING TOGETHER Strengthening South Asian Communities in America

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF SOUTH ASIANS IN THE UNITED STATES
April 2019

This factsheet, based primarily on Census 2010 and the 2017 American Community Survey, provides a national snapshot of the South Asian American community. We encourage community leaders, government entities, policymakers, and the media to use this data to better understand South Asian Americans and help inform their engagement with this community.

Who are South Asians?

The South Asian community in the United States includes individuals who trace their ancestry to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The community also includes members of the South Asian diaspora – past generations of South Asians who originally settled in other parts of the world, including the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, Canada and the Middle East, and other parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands.

Population Numbers at a Glance

Below are some key facts about the national population in the United States from Census 2010 data and the 2017 American Community Survey:

- **Nearly 5.4 million South Asians live in the United States** tracing their roots to Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and the diaspora, including but not limited to Trinidad/Tobago, Guyana, Fiji, Tanzania, and Kenya.[1] This is up from 3.5 million counted in Census 2010.
- Indians comprise the largest segment of the South Asian community, making up over 80% of the total population, followed by Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Nepali, Sri Lankans, and Bhutanese.
- Data is not readily available for diaspora South Asian communities specifically the Indo-Caribbean, and Indo-African communities.

Population Growth

The South Asian American community grew roughly 40% between 2010 and 2017**.** (See Table 1) The Nepali community experienced the most significant growth, increasing by 206.6% followed by Indian, Bhutanese, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan populations.

By 2065, it is projected that Asian Americans will be the largest immigrant population.[2] The term immigrant refers to individuals living in the United States but were not U.S. citizens at birth and necessarily all individuals who trace their ancestry to a country outside of the United States. Bhutanese (92%) and Nepalese (88%) communities have the highest foreign-born shares, followed by Sri Lankans (78%), Bangladeshis (74%), Indians (69%), and Pakistanis (67%).[3]

Table 1: Changes in South Asian American Population, 2010 to 2017

	Single Ethnicity Reported[4]			Multiple Ethnicities Reported[5]		
	2010	2017	Percent Change	2010	2017	Percent Change
Bangladeshi	142,080	176,229	24%	147,300	185,622	26%
Bhutanese	18,814	23,904	27%	19,439	26,845	38.1%
Indian	2,918,807	4,094,539	40.3%	3,183,063	4,402,362	38.3%
Maldivian	102	N/A	N/A	127	N/A	N/A
Nepali	57,209	171,709	200.1%	59,490	182,385	206.6%
Pakistani	382,994	499,099	30.3%	409,163	544,640	33.1%

[1] U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates "ASIAN ALONE BY SELECTED GROUPS" bit.ly/2CHSrrX
[2] "Future Immigration will Change the Face of America by 2065" *Pew Research Center*. 2017. pewrsr.ch/1ja3uON
[3] "Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population" pewrsr.ch/2JGh5Pu
[4] U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates "ASIAN ALONE BY SELECTED GROUPS" bit.ly/2CHSrrX
[5] U.S. Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates "ASIAN ALONE OR IN ANY COMBINATION BY SELECTED GROUPS" bit.ly/2CHSrrX

Sri Lankan	41,456	44,460	7.2%	45,381	52,448	15.6%
Total for Selected Ethnicities	3,561,462	5,009,940	40.7%	3,863,963	5,394,302	39.6%

(*No ACS 2017 data available for Maldivian populations. Data are available only for the population groups having a population of 100 or more of that specific group within a particular geographic area.)

Table 2: Top 5 Metro Areas for Selected South Asian Groups[6]

Bangladeshi	Bhutanese	Indian	Nepali	Pakistani	Sri Lankan
New York City, NY	Atlanta, GA	New York City, NY	New York City, NY	New York City, NY	New York City, NY
Washington, DC	Dallas, TX	Chicago, IL	Washington, DC	Houston, TX	Los Angeles, CA
Detroit MI	Houston, TX	Washington, DC	Dallas TX	Chicago, IL	Washington, DC
Los Angeles, CA	Seattle, WA	Los Angeles, CA	Boston, MA	Washington, DC	San Francisco, CA
Philadelphia, PA	Phoenix, AZ	San Francisco, CA	San Francisco, CA	Dallas, TX	Dallas, TX

*No data available for Maldivian populations. Data are available only for the population groups having a population of 100 or more of that specific group within a particular geographic area.

Table 3: Top 3 States for Selected South Asian Groups[7]

	Bangladeshi	**India**	**Nepali**	**Pakistani**	**Sri Lankan**
1	New York (96,000)	California (464,000)	Texas (16,000)	New York (65,000)	California (12,000)
2	New Jersey, California, Michigan (15,000)	New Jersey (253,000)	New York, California (12,0000	Texas (56,000)	New York (6,0000
3	Texas (13,000)	Texas (233,000)	Virginia (9,000)	California (49,000)	Texas (5,000)

*No data available for Bhutanese or Maldivian populations for ACS 2017

Undocumented South Asians

- As of 2017, there are 630,000 undocumented Indians alone in the United States, marking a 72% increase in undocumented Indians since 2010. The increase can be attributed to Indian immigrants overstaying visas, nearly 250,000 Indians overstayed their visa in 2016 therefore becoming undocumented.[8]
- As of August 2018, there are approximately 2,550 active Indian DACA recipients. Only 13% of the overall 20,000 DACA eligible Indians have applied and received DACA.[9]
- There are 1,300 active Pakistani DACA recipients, 470 Bangladeshi recipients, 120 Sri Lankan recipients, and 60 Nepali recipients.[10]
- The immigrant population density of the country shows that undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants live in New York (19,000); Michigan (4,000); Virginia (3,000); and California (2,000).[11]

[6] 2010 Census Total Population Data; Summary File 2
[7] "U.S. Immigrant Population by State and County" *Migration Policy Institute*. bit.ly/2FwywMA
[8] "US Undocumented Population Continued to Fall from 2016 to 2017, and Visa Overstays Significantly Exceeded Illegal Crossings for the Seventh Consecutive Year." *Center for Migration Studies.* 2018. bit.ly/2UydHaC
[9] "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools" *MPI*. 2018. bit.ly/2j3eor7
[10] "Approximate Active DACA Recipients." *USCIS*. bit.ly/2YndfhP
[11] "Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles." *MPI*. https://bit.ly/2EFumF1

- Migration Policy Institute (MPI) analysis shows that the top 5 states in which undocumented Indian immigrants live are: California (47,000); New Jersey (41,000); Texas (32,000); New York (24,000); Illinois (20,000)[12]

South Asians on TPS, Green Cards, H-4 and H-1B visas

There are nearly 15,000 Nepali Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders who are at risk of losing their status. In April 2018, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) terminated temporary protected status for Nepal, and visas are expected to expire to on June 24, 2019. Adhikaar is leading litigation efforts with the TPS Alliance. As a result of successful joint advocacy for DREAM and TPS holders, Congress introduced the Dream and Promise Act in March, 2019 to provide a path to citizenship for these immigrants.

Over 9.5% of green card recipients in FY 2017 were from South Asian countries: Bangladesh (14,693); Bhutan (2,940); India (60,394); Nepal (11,610); Pakistan (17,408); and Sri Lanka (1,627).[13]
See our Guide to Advocacy on Legal Immigration Reform.[14]

Since 1997, more than 1.7 million dependent spouses of H-1B visa holders have received H-4 visas.[15] In FY 2017, 136,000 individuals received H-4 status. Nearly 86% of H-4 visa holders are from South Asian countries. In 2015, DHS granted work authorization to certain H-4 visa holders. As of December 2017, approximately 127,000 visa holders were approved for H-4 EAD. The administration is expected to announce a rule rescinding the 2015 work authorization.
See our Community Guide on H-4 EAD Rescission.[16]

South Asian American Poverty Levels

Income inequality has been reported to be the greatest among Asian Americans. According to 2018 Pew data, Asian Americans in the top 10% of income distribution earned 10.7 times as much as Asian Americans in the bottom 10%.[17]
See our Community Guide on "Public Charge".[18]

- **Nearly 472,000 or 10% of the approximately five million South Asians in the U.S. live in poverty.**[19]
- Among South Asian Americans, Pakistanis (15.8%), Nepalis (23.9%), Bangladeshis (24.2%), and Bhutanese (33.3%) had the highest poverty rates.[20]
- Bangladeshi and Nepali communities have the lowest median household incomes out of all Asian American groups, earning $49,800 and $43,500 respectively.[21]
- Nearly 61% of non-citizen Bangladeshi American families receive public benefits for at least one of the four federal programs including TANF, SSI, SNAP, and Medicaid/CHIP, 48% of non-citizen Pakistani families and 11% of non-citizen Indian families also receive public benefits.[22]

South Asian Detention and Deportation

As of 2017, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has detained 3,013 South Asians compromising of 2,376 Indians, 257 Bangladeshis, 211 Nepalis, 160 Pakistanis, 92 Sri Lankans, 9 Bhutanese.[23]
Between October 2014 - April 2018 Customs and Border Protection (CBP) arrested 12,670 Indians; 1,752 Bangladeshis; 1,744 Nepalis, 659 Pakistanis, 292 Sri Lankans, 2 Bhutanese (Aug-Sept 2017 data unavailable).[24]

A recent report from Syracuse University found that "detained immigrants from India had the highest odds of being granted bond — 87 percent during FY 2018, and 73 percent so far during FY 2019."[25] Although a majority of Indian asylum-seekers are granted bonds nationally, they also "had the highest required median bond amounts — $17,000 in FY 2018 and $20,000 in FY 2019. Similarly, detained immigrants from Nepal, China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh typically also had high required bond amounts, combined with higher odds of being granted bond."[26]

SAALT and partners have documented South Asians detained and deported by ICE and CBP:

- In 2014, 37 Punjabi asylum seekers were detained in the El Paso Processing Center.

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[12] "Unauthorized Immigrant Population Profiles." *MPI*. bit.ly/2EFumF1
[13] "Legal Immigration and Status Report Quarterly Data" *DHS*. bit.ly/2uvsjMA
[14] "Guide to Advocacy on Legal Immigration Reform" *SAALT*. Dec 2018. bit.ly/2uCFThj
[15] "Nonimmigrant Visa Issuances by Visa Class and by Nationality: FY1997-2017 NIV Detail Table" *U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs.* bit.ly/2Lk3aeQ
[16] "Community Guide on H-4 EAD Rescission" *SAALT*. bit.ly/2WrloyS
[17] "Income Inequality in the U.S. Is Rising Most Rapidly Among Asians." *Pew Research Center*. 2018. pewrsr.ch/2zuLWty
[18] "Community Guide on 'Public Charge'" *SAALT*. 2018. bit.ly/2YqETdJ
[19] "Asian American Factsheets" *Pew Research Center*. 2015. bit.ly/2z1gGzz
[20] *Ibid.*
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] "ICE Detainees" *TRAC Immigration.* June 2018. trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/detention
[24] "Border Patrol Arrests" *TRAC Immigration.* April 2018. trac.syr.edu/phptools/immigration/cbparrest
[25] "Importance of Nationality in Immigration Court Bond Decisions" *TRAC Immigration*. 12 Feb. 2019. trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/545
[26] *Ibid.*

- In 2015, 54 South Asian asylum seekers, mainly from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan went on hunger strike at the El Paso Processing Center.
- In 2018, 70 South Asian detained immigrants were denied access to counsel, language interpretation, and religious accommodations in the Yamhill County Federal Prison in Sheridan, OR.
- In June 2018, over 100 South Asian asylum seekers at the ICE Processing Facility in Folkston, Georgia went on a second hunger strike.
- In June 2018, nearly 400 South Asian asylum seekers were held in Federal Correctional Institution in Victorville, CA.
- In January 2019, 30 Punjabi and Cuban asylum seekers were detained in El Paso Processing Center. Nine of the asylum seekers were force fed and placed in solitary confinement.

Denaturalization and Operation Janus

DHS is currently reviewing 700,000 files for denaturalization of naturalized citizens that are claimed to have obtained citizenship "fraudulently" from countries including Afghanistan, India, Bangladeshi, Somalia, Haiti, and Nigeria.[27] The Department of Justice (DOJ) filed civil denaturalization complaints against Baljinder Singh of New Jersey, Parvez Manzoor Khan of Florida, and Rashid Mahmood of Connecticut under Operation Janus. In January 2018, Baljinder Singh of New Jersey, whose fingerprints were missing from the centralized digital fingerprint repository, was denaturalized by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

Implications of South Asian Demographics on Hate Violence

SAALT's latest report, "Communities on Fire",[28] illustrates a direct connection between xenophobic political rhetoric and policies and the rising tide of hate violence. We found that one in five perpetrators of hate violence incidents referenced President Trump, a Trump policy, or a Trump campaign slogan while committing the act of violence, underlining a strong link between the Trump administration's anti-Muslim agenda and hate violence post-election.

In the year following the Presidential election, SAALT catalogued 213 incidents of hate violence aimed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab American communities, a 45% increase from the 2015-2016 pre-election period. As of March 2019, SAALT has documented 469 incidents of hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric.
See our Community Guide on Hate Crimes.[29]

Implications of South Asian Demographics on Electoral Participation

In the lead up to the 2020 elections, South Asians are becoming an increasingly powerful segment of the American electorate. According to the Current Population Survey (CPS), 49.9% of voting-age, Asian American citizens cast a ballot in 2016. The number of Asian American voters in the last decade has nearly doubled from about 2 million voters in 2001 to 5 million voters in 2016.
See APIAVote and AAPIData - 2018 Asian American Voter Survey

Citizen Voting Age Population (CVAP) describes the total South Asian American population that is eligible to vote.[30]
Bangladeshi - 69,825
Bhutanese - 1,242
Indian - 1,558,594
Nepalese - 18,931
Pakistani - 222,252
Sri Lankan - 22,161

How can stakeholders use this data?

Community leaders, government entities, policymakers, and the media can use this data to better understand South Asian Americans and help inform their engagement with this rapidly growing community.

- **Community-based organizations** can use this data as background for funding requests, media interviews, and advocacy with government entities.
- **Government agencies** at the federal, state, and local levels can use this data for improved data collection and community engagement on various issues such as racial profiling, immigration, and hate violence.
- **Legislators** at the federal, state, and local levels can use this data to better understand where South Asian American constituents reside to deepen relationships with the community and reflect their needs in policymaking.
- **Media** can use this data as background for elevating stories covering the South Asian American community on various issues, including elections, immigration, and civil rights.

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[27] "Denaturalization: Understanding the Process and Recent Increases in Denaturalization Efforts" *ILRC.* bit.ly/2JQg6N4
[28] "Communities on Fire" *SAALT*. bit.ly/2GfbCfS
[29] "Community Guide on Hate Crimes" *SAALT*. bit.ly/2HYrljX
[30] "Citizen Voting Age Population" *AAPIData.* 2015 ACS 5-Year estimates. bit.ly/2OzhKBr